



Timothy C. Boyce

State Forester's Message

By **TIMOTHY C. BOYCE**
State Forester

MANY of you may be familiar with the naturalist William Bartram (1739-1823). His exploration of the South began in 1773, and his travels across Alabama went from early July 1778 and ended in early January 1779. In 1791 Bartram published his "Travels," which was an account of his journey through the Southeast. I recently read Bartram's work and would like to share some of it with you.

Bartram's journal is a must read for those who are interested in the natural world of Alabama and the native Americans who inhabited our great state. As he traveled through Alabama and the Southeast, Bartram found a fascinating world of beauty and diversity. He writes extensively about the diversity not only in terms of the natural world but also in the people he meets. He encountered many different tribes or cultures of native Americans with different languages and customs as well as people from different ethnic backgrounds, such as the French who inhabited the Mobile area. Today Alabama is still one of the most diverse places in the world both naturally and culturally. We must continue to recognize the strength in this diversity as we continue to make Alabama better for people through forestry.

Here are some excerpts from Bartram's journal. The spelling and terminology are taken as is from the book. If you would like to read more of Bartram's journal, it is available at most public libraries.

"Early next morning, our guide having performed his duty, took leave, returning home, and we continued on our journey, entering on the great plains. (Bartram is describing the Black Belt south of Tallahassee, Alabama.) We had not proceeded far before our people roused a litter of young wolves, to which giving chase, we soon caught one of them, it being entangled in high grass—this creature was about half the size of a small cur-dog, and quite black . . ."

"A few trees and shrubs or undergrowth, which were entangled with grape vines (Vitis campestris) of a peculiar species; the bunches (racemes) of fruit were very large, as were the grapes that composed them. The Indians gather great quantities of them, which they prepare for keeping, by first sweating them on hurdles over a gentle fire, and afterwards drying them on their bunches in the sun and air, and store them up for provision."

"We now entered a very remarkable grove of Dog wood trees (Cornus florida), which continued nine or ten miles unalterable, except here and there a towering Magnolia grandiflora . . . These trees were about twelve feet high, spreading horizontally; their limbs meeting and interlocking with each other, formed one vast, shady, cool grove, so dense and humid as to exclude the sun-beams, and prevent the intrusion of almost every other vegetable, affording us a most desirable shelter from the fervid sun-beams at noon-day. Early next morning we arose, hunted up our horses and proceeded on . . ."

"This district exhibited a landscape very different from what had presented to view since we left the Nation, and not much unlike the low countries of Caroline; it is in fact one vast grassy savanna and Cane meadows, intersected or variously scrolled over with narrow forests and groves, on the banks of creeks and rivulets, or hommocks and swamps at their sources; with long leaved Pines, scatteringly planted, amongst the grass . . ."

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A TREASURE Forest Plan will have property information such as a legal description, stand table and a summary of the landowner's desires for the property. Each plan also has a set of maps such as an area map giving the general location and a property map detailing the boundaries, timber stands, roads, and other special areas. Each stand is described and management recommendations made based on the landowners objectives. Often other natural resource specialists, such as a wildlife biologist, are asked to assist in making specific recommendations.

As might be expected, the demand for TREASURE Forest plans in some counties exceeds the ability of the Alabama Forestry Commission to produce them. After the 1990 Farm Bill was passed, the Management Plan Contract Program (MPCP) was developed. This is where the Alabama Forestry Commission contracts with an approved registered forester to produce a plan for a landowner. The forester is paid a fee by the AFC based on the number of acres owned by the landowner. The AFC targets landowners with larger acreages that might otherwise significantly impact the ability of personnel to accomplish other agency missions.

Another source for landowners to consider is the many consultant foresters working throughout the state. The Association of Consulting Foresters currently has 26 members in Alabama with eight foresters listed in candidate status. The vast majority—approximately 70 percent—of the forestland in Alabama is owned by private non-industrial landowners. It is vitally important that these landowners receive the benefits that a management plan can offer. Society also benefits from well-managed forests, from the thousands of products derived from trees, the clean water forests provide, the wildlife that thrives in them, and the tremendous economic boost all of this brings to Alabama.

If you or someone you know owns forestland in Alabama and could benefit from a TREASURE Forest management plan, contact your local Alabama Forestry Commission office for assistance or complete the adjacent form and return it to the address listed. 📧

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"Next day early in the morning I embarked in a boat and proceeded to Mobile, along the banks of islands (near twenty miles) which lay in the middle of the river, between the Eastern and Western shores of the main: the banks of these low flat rich islands are well cultivated, having on them extensive farms and some good habitations, chiefly the property of French gentlemen, who reside in the city, as being more pleasant and healthy. Leaving these islands, we continued ten or twelve miles between the Eastern main and a chain of low grassy islands, too low and wet for cultivation: then crossed over the head of the bay, and arrived in town in the evening." (He is describing the Mobile Delta.)

"The man and his three sons are famous hunters. I was assured, from good authority, that the old gentleman, for his own part, kills three hundred deer annually, besides bears, tygers, and wolves."

"The males of the Cherokees, Muscogulges, Siminoles, Chickasaws, Chactaws, and confederate tribes of the Creeks, are tall, erect, and moderately robust; their limbs are well shaped, so as generally to form a perfect human figure; their feature regular, and countenance open, dignified and placid; yet the forehead and brow so formed, as to strike you instantly with heroism and bravery; the eye though rather small, yet active and full of fire; the iris always black, and the nose commonly inclining to the aquiline."

"Their countenance and actions exhibit an air of magnanimity, superiority and independence."

"Their complexion of a reddish brown of copper colour; their hair long, lank, coarse, and black as a raven, and reflecting like lustre at different exposures to the light."

"They marry only for a year's time, and, according to ancient custom, at the expiration of the year they renew the marriage: but there is seldom an instance of their separating after they have children. If it should so happen, the mother takes the children under her own protection, though the father is obliged to contribute towards their maintenance during their minority and the mother's widowhood."

"After the feast of the busk is over, and all the grain is ripe, the whole town again assemble, and every man carries off the fruits of his labour, from the part first allotted him, which he deposits in his own granary; which is individually his own. But previous to their carrying off their crops from the field, there is a large crib or granary, erected in the plantation, which is called the king's crib; and to this each family carries and deposits a certain quantity, according to his ability or inclination, or none at all if he so chooses: this in appearance seems a tribute or revenue to the mico; but in fact is designed for another purpose, i.e. that of a public treasury, supplied by a few and voluntary contributions, and to which every citizen has the right of free and equal access, when his own private stores are consumed; to serve as a surplus to fly to for succour; to assist neighbouring towns, whose crops may have failed; accommodate strangers, or travellers."

"Next morning entered the Tombigbe, and ascended that fine river."

*"Opposite this bluff, on the other side of the river, is a district of sawamp or low land, the richest I ever saw, or perhaps any where to be seen: as for the trees I shall forbear to describe them, because it would appear incredible; let it suffice to mention, that the Cypress, Ash, Platanus, Populus Liquidambar, and others, are by far the tallest, straightest, and every way the most enormous that I have seen or heard of. And as a proof of the extraordinary fertility of the soil, the reeds or canes (*Arundo gigantea*) grew here thirty or forty feet high, and as thick as a man's arm, or three or four inches in diameter."*

Excerpts taken from **Travels of William Bartram**, edited by Mark Van Doren, Dover Publications, Macy-Masius, publishers, 1928. 📖